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[Home](#) / [news](#) /

May Day marchers shut down Broad Street

By Louis Llovio



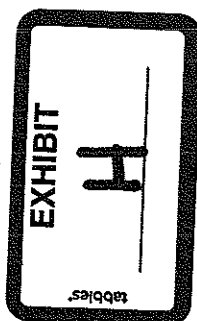
Union supporters and labor activists brought eastbound traffic on West Broad Street to a standstill Sunday afternoon despite a federal judge denying the group a permit to march.

The marchers, a group of about 250 marking May Day, clogged West Broad between North Harrison and North Pine streets for about 10 minutes as they walked east.

Leaders of the May Day Coalition/Organizing Committee, which put on the march and an earlier festival at Monroe Park, had urged participants to remain on the sidewalks.

But from the moment the group left the park heading west on Main Street, marchers began slowly moving off the sidewalks.

While organizers had warned that police could try to forcibly keep marchers off the street, Richmond police did not show up until the procession had made its way onto Broad Street from Harrison Street.



Even then, one police vehicle with its sirens on was stuck in traffic behind several vehicles, including a GRTC Transit bus. A second officer pulled in front of the marchers and then let them go by without saying a word.

Meanwhile, the marchers continued to chant: "Whose streets? Our streets!"

A federal judge Thursday turned down the Richmond May Day Coalition/Organizing Committee's efforts to hold a parade Sunday without paying \$294 for off-duty police officers to serve as escorts.

Lauren Vincelli, one of the organizers, said the group could have come up with the fee but didn't out of principle.

"We shouldn't have to pay. We bear that expense through our taxes," she said.

The marchers, whose walk began and ended at Monroe Park, were led by a brass band that gave the march the groove of a New Orleans funeral procession. The sign-waving participants, some in costume, alternately danced and chanted.

Many shouted "Happy May Day" to the curious onlookers who stopped to watch and those who peered from apartment windows and cars — including a police officer stopped at a red light on North Harrison Street and Floyd Avenue.

Zuraha Abbamin, a Virginia Commonwealth University junior, jumped about 6 feet from her first-floor apartment window to join the marchers as they passed her building on North Pine Street.

"We all have to unite," she said as the marchers greeted her with cheers.

May Day is celebrated annually on May 1 and is sometimes called International Workers' Day. The day is celebrated with political demonstrations put on by labor groups and activists.

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